

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SUPREME COURT JUSTICE THOMAS KILBRIDE ADDRESSES LEGAL AID LAWYERS

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas L. Kilbride, himself a former legal aid lawyer and longtime advocate for volunteer legal efforts by attorneys, will be the keynote speaker at a statewide conference for Illinois legal aid providers.

Justice Kilbride will join former Illinois Congressman John N. Erlenborn, president of the publicly funded Legal Services Corp., in addressing the conference Monday, July 29 at the Fairmont hotel in Chicago. Justice Kilbride is scheduled to speak at 1 p.m. at an awards luncheon.

The Statewide Legal Services Advocates Conference marks the first time since 1989 that public service lawyers in Illinois have met together as a group.

"It is the first time in 13 years that all these people involved in legal services for the poor have gotten together, and that is important," said Joseph A. Dailing, executive director of Prairies State Legal Services Inc. "It reflects new statewide cooperation and effort in working together to figure out new ways to provide legal services to poor people in Illinois during a time of declining resources.

"It is a culmination of planning by all the legal services programs in Illinois along with the leadership of the Illinois State Bar Association and the Chicago Bar Association working to improve and maximize these services around the state."

Justice Kilbride, long a champion of legal services programs in Illinois and who practices with Prairie State legal Services from 1981 to 1987, is expected to give the some 250 attendees a "pep talk" and outline efforts by the Illinois Supreme Court to help ease a budget crunch in providing legal services to the poor.

Mr. Erlenborn is expected to announce at the conference that Illinois will suffer funding cuts in the seven figures from the Legal Services Corp., the entity that distributes and oversees federal money for legal aid.

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Last year, the LSC gave Illinois nearly \$12 million – or a third of the money going to the state’s legal aid programs. LSC money is used to fund attorneys and services for the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, Prairie State Legal Services based in Rockford, and Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation based in Alton.

In addition to lessened funds from LSC, money for legal aid services in Illinois has diminished because one of the primary sources of support comes from the bank interest generated on client assets held in trust by lawyers in Illinois, and those interest rates have fallen dramatically.

The Illinois Supreme Court has made legal aid to the poor a primary area of focus.

Last year, it formed a special committee to study and make recommendations on how to encourage every practicing attorney in the state to render some form of free legal work to those who cannot afford it.

Chief Justice Moses W. Harrison II has urged greater involvement in pro bono services by lawyers, and asked every attorney in Illinois to provide some free legal service each day.

The Court also has unveiled the outlines of another plan to aid funding and Justice Kilbride will speak about that plan’s progress. It involves a proposal to increase attorney registration fees to help offset the shortfall in interest income.

Justice Kilbride grew up in the Kankakee area., graduated magna cum laude from St. Mary’s College in Winona, Minnesota; and received his law degree from Antioch School of Law in Washington, D.C.

After leaving Prairie State Legal Services, Inc. in 1987, Justice Kilbride engaged in the private practice of law in the Rock Island area. His pro bono efforts continued as he represented several environmental organizations and citizens in opposition to landfills in several Illinois counties. He also was a volunteer lawyer for the Children’s Disability Project and an organizer for the United Farm Workers in Chicago and San Diego.

The Fairmont Hotel is located at 200 N. Columbus Drive in Chicago.